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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION - THE ARAB SUMMIT IN DAMASCUS

Summary

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Tuesday, April 1, 2008

Summary: Following the March 29-30, 2008, Arab Summit in Damascus, which was attended by Kuwait's Amir, Kuwaiti media commentators characterized it as a failure. Key no-shows of Arab leaders highlighted the gap between pro-American and pro-Syrian Arab regimes and no substantive progress was made addressing key issues such as Lebanon or Iran. End summary.

Block Quotes:

-- In his daily column in the moderate Arabic daily Al Qabas Mohammad Musaed Al Saleh criticized the standard of success adopted by the Arab Summit hosting country(04/01):

"Nine leaders missed the summit in Damascus. However, the summit's final statement was in fact crafted at the meeting of the Arab Foreign Ministers, which preceded it. So the absence of those nine leaders did not affect the outcome. Of course, any host country is keen to portray the summit as a success, so disagreement was discouraged. But even if the leaders did disagree amongst themselves, the public would not know about it. Thus I believe this summit in Damascus will be just like the previous ones -- a success on paper that will be forgotten by its leaders as soon as they arrive back home."

-- An article in the conservative Arabic Daily Al Wasat, Mohamad Sayed commented on other opinions of the summit (04/01):

"Many analysts think that the Arab Summit in Damascus revealed the gap between pro-American and pro-Syrian Arab states. It has little chance of moving forward any solution to the Lebanese crises. One analyst, for example, wondered, 'What is the point of making decisions without enforcing them? This confirms that there is near unanimity among the Arabs that Syria has pushed too far in manipulating the Lebanese issue. The Egyptian president and the Saudi representative did not attend the summit believing that Syria is obstructing any political solution in Lebanon.'"

-- "The Post-Damascus Summit: An Absent Dialogue and Failing Initiatives" is the headline of a commentary by Waheed Abdel Majeed, a columnist in the newly established Arabic daily Awan, who said (04/01):

"The pan-Arabic Regime is not collapsing despite the differences we

witnessed at the Damascus Summit. The differences that emerged in Damascus were not enough to bring an end to future summits, as some have predicted. There have been many Arab crises before, which normally result in conflict. While such eventualities might not destroy the pan-Arab Regime, it will likely turn some countries into battlefields for many years."

-- Conservative and member of the Salafi movement Dr. Wael Al Hisawi sarcastically ridiculed Syrian claims of a successful Arab summit. In his daily column in the moderate Arab daily Al Rai he said, (04/01):

"Of the Arab leaders who attended the summit, half were there out of courtesy and the other half out of fear of embarrassment. The summit's final resolution consisted of dull statements. Even the leaders who were present would have had a hard time believing what it said. According to the Syrians the summit was a success simply because it took place where and when it was supposed to. May we have many more such successful summits if success is measured by these standards!"

-- Under the Headline "The lies of Baghdad and Damascus' Sahhafs," Mr. Abdullah Al Hadlaq opined in the conservative Arabic daily Al Watan (04/01) [Note: The word Sahhaf is used here sarcastically to refer to the Iraqi Minister of Information during the fall of Baghdad in 2003.]:

"As expected, the summit of separation in Damascus failed even before it was held. This in spite of assertions by the Sahhaf of Damascus to call it the 'Summit of Arab Cooperation.' It was not just a failure; it was a step backward. President Assad the father had a relationship of mutual benefit with Iran. However, his son now has developed the relationship into a submissive one. He has succumbed to Tehran's wishes and orders."

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